



BECOME AN INTERNET TV STAR

Everyone's talking about YouTube, but how do you prepare your video for online distribution? **James Morris** explains how to make money out of your movies

Digital camcorders and many digital cameras enable you to shoot video clips, pop them on your PC and edit them into a visual masterpiece in almost the blink of an eye. Thanks to the internet and the prevalence of broadband, it is easy to distribute your work to a worldwide audience. Not only that, but your movies could even earn you some money. The era of online TV has arrived, and here we'll show you how to get in right at the start.

PREPARING VIDEO FOR THE WEB

If you're not already editing your own video, check out the articles included on this month's cover disc, 'How to... Make a video for YouTube' and 'Making a movie on your PC'. When shooting a video specifically for the web, there are a few things you need to consider before you get to the editing stage.

Most online video is currently streamed at resolutions of 320x240. This is a massive improvement over the postage-stamp footage of a few years ago, but it's still hardly DVD quality. This imposes some constraints on what works well online.

The parallels are similar to television compared with film when the former was introduced. Partly because of its lower resolution, TV has traditionally tended to focus

much more on talking heads than film does, with a lot more close-ups and fewer long shots. The same is also true of web-oriented footage. The resolution simply won't do justice to those beautiful landscape panoramas, so it's best to make your subject matter fill the screen as much as possible.

You should also remember that putting your videos on a site such as YouTube means they will face a public forum. If your video making is bad, there's a good chance someone will tell you about it, assuming they bother to watch it in the first place. Don't just point a camera at yourself and assume the results will be good. Write a script, and plan what you shoot in advance as much as possible.

For most video-sharing sites, shorter is always better. So try to come up with ideas for videos just a few minutes in length. Keep your editing as professional as possible, too, without making things dry and boring. This will help your productions stand out against the sloppily produced content that fills the internet. In the past you may have edited videos for friends and family, who will probably be reasonably forgiving of any editing foibles, but on a public video-sharing site your audience will be less generous. Always bear in mind who you are trying to communicate with and tailor your material accordingly.

DELIVERY FORMATS

Before today's video-sharing websites came along you had to pay close attention to the video format you used for streaming, because it needed to be the right one for your chosen delivery mechanism. Despite increases in broadband speeds, you still can't simply stream the native files that camcorders create. MiniDV digital video runs at around 3.6MB/s, as does high-definition video. MPEG2-based standard-definition camcorders and the new AVCHD format are a little more frugal, but none of these formats can be streamed directly.

You therefore need to use a video format optimised for web streaming, such as Windows Media Video or Real Media. Many of the current big names in web video, such as YouTube, use Flash Video as their delivery mechanism. Only a few applications can actually encode in this format, however, so an intermediary is required.

This is not normally a problem, as most video-sharing sites accept video in all the common file formats and will convert the file to their preferred format automatically. This isn't the best way of maintaining quality, though, because having compressed your video once already to transfer it to the service, it is then compressed again. However, at least it means you don't have to worry too much about which format to use.



◀ YouTube is now the de facto brand in online video sharing, but it is far from the only service worth considering for your own footage

Read the guidelines for your chosen service – some of which we will outline in the next section. Follow them as closely as possible, while using the highest resolution and largest file size the site allows, to maintain quality.

This brings us to choosing a video-hosting service – and there are plenty to choose from.

CHOOSING YOUR VIDEO SERVICE

YouTube has grabbed all the headlines lately, but there are still many other online video sites available, with different benefits and limitations. Here we are going to take a closer look at some of the most significant ones. We have also provided a table summarising them on the opposite page. Many of these services are free or have free options, so for maximum exposure you may want to put your videos up on more than one site.

Let's start with YouTube, as the name is now almost synonymous with online video. YouTube is free – simply register with the site and you're ready to go. However, it has its limitations. The service accepts video in WMV, AVI, MOV and MPEG file formats, but MPEG4 at 320x240 with MP3 audio is considered optimal. YouTube is now restricted to 100MB per file and a maximum of 10 minutes. It used to be possible to upload longer videos, but this category of account has been discontinued for new users. It's also worth noting that fitting 10 minutes of video into 100MB requires heavy compression, which causes a considerable reduction in quality, so it's best to keep your video under five minutes unless it contains a lot of still images, which don't suffer from high compression settings as much as video.

Before Google bought YouTube it had its own service, which is still available. Google Video (<http://video.google.com>) also has a 100MB file size limit, but only if you use its web-based interface. A separate uploader utility is available for Windows, Mac and Linux, which doesn't have any file size or movie length limitations. It can also upload multiple files in succession. However, you still need to use the web interface to fill in the title, description and other details about each of your videos. You can't enter these in the uploader.

Google accepts videos in a range of formats, including MPEG, AVI, RA, RAM, MOV, WMV,

ASF, MOD and MP3. However, your videos won't be available immediately. Google checks submissions to make sure they're not obscene or copyrighted by someone else, which usually takes a couple of days. During this time, you can log into the web interface again, where you will find your uploaded file listed, even if it isn't ready for viewing. Clicking on the Edit link under Video Information will take you to a page where you can add the title, description, genre and other information for your video. The Advanced options section even allows you to charge a fee for your content, either as a complete download or a 24-hour viewing pass. Google is therefore an ideal choice if you want to sell premium content, assuming that you can convince people to buy it.

PUBLISH AND BE DAMNED

Another site that allows you to charge people to download and watch video is Lulu (www.lulu.com), the self-publishing book service. Once you've set up an account, go to the Digital Media section of Lulu's Publish tools. This lets you upload all manner of files, including video.

Unlike Google, which offers a streaming video interface as well as downloading, Lulu only lets users download video files. This is still a useful way of making your videos available to viewers all over the world, and you can even make them pay to download the content if you like. With downloads, you can also use any file format you want, as long as your viewers have the required player to view it.

However, in a climate in which YouTube is jam-packed with free content, your chances of getting people to pay to watch your videos are pretty slim unless you happen to be making new episodes of *Lost* or *24*. Revver (www.revver.com) has an interesting slant on the idea of getting paid for your videos. The site pairs uploaded videos with adverts. As people view your video, you accrue ad revenue. Many web advertisers pay for space based on the number of clicks made on their advert, and Revver shares this revenue with the video-maker and with people who share the video with others by emailing it or embedding it in blogs and websites.

Revver isn't the only site trying this kind of approach. VuMe.com (formerly www.efoof.com) shares ad revenue to the tune of \$3 (around

£1.50) for every 1,000 hits on content you put up, although you need to make at least \$25 (around £12) before you receive your first cheque. In January, YouTube also announced plans to share ad revenue with those whose videos get the most viewings. However, only a handful of the most popular YouTube users have so far been invited into this programme.

PREMIUM VIDEO-SHARING SITES

There are also plenty of video-sharing sites where the money flows in the opposite direction. These sites offer more than just video sharing, though, often adding photo and file sharing to the mix, and even online data backup.

One of the longest-running of these sites is Neptune MediaShare (www.neptune.com). You can try Neptune's service free for three days. After that, prices start at \$59 (around £30) a year for 150MB of storage, rising to \$599 (around £300) a year for 10GB. Bandwidth limits for each type of account also apply. Neptune's service has a simple, functional interface and streams the video files you upload rather than converting them to its own preferred format. It supports video in WMV and QuickTime formats, but the web interface requires Internet Explorer to function.

DropShots (www.dropshots.com) is similar, but it provides both free and premium services. With the free option you can upload up to 500 photos and 10 videos of up to two minutes each. For \$4.95 (around £2.50) a month, you can upload an unlimited number of photos and videos. Video can be up to ten minutes long, with a resolution of 600x450. This is much closer to DVD resolution than you get on YouTube. DropShots has a similar browsing front-end to Neptune MediaShare, but adds the ability to leave comments, giving the site a greater sense of community. Supported video formats include MPEG1, 2 and 4, QuickTime and WMV 7, 8 and 9.

Streamload's MediaMax service (www.mediamax.com) has four levels. The free service limits you to 10MB per file, but you can upload as much as 25GB of video. For \$4.95 (around £2.50) a month, the limit on individual files rises to 1GB and storage to 100GB, and there are more expensive and feature-rich options above that. MediaMax is ideal if you want to put a video longer than a few minutes online.

Mydeo (www.mydeo.com) is another service with no free option. For £4.87 a month, the Home User Plan lets you store up to 100 minutes of footage, with a 30-minute cap on each individual video. The Premium User Plan costs £7.47 a month and increases the total to 250 minutes and 90 minutes per video. A one-month free trial of the Home User Plan is available. Mydeo supports only WMV files, and you have to convert video to this format yourself. Your viewers will need Windows Media Player to watch, but there are no limits on the resolution.

BEST OF THE REST

We mentioned earlier that the number of sharing sites is vast, and we weren't joking. It's not possible to list them all, but here are some other notable examples. Other than a 25MB maximum file size, www.putfile.com has no limitations, so you can upload as many files as you like. Videos can be in WMV, AVI, MPEG, MOV, ASF, ASX, MP4 and 3G2 formats. You get your own homepage, but it's a little more



rudimentary than what you get from Neptune or DropShots. GoFish (www.gofish.com) is another site that offers unlimited storage, but each video must be 100MB or under.

Perhaps the weirdest video sharing site we've come across is www.my5minutes.com. This gives you unlimited video storage, but uses the BitTorrent peer-to-peer file sharing system for downloading. It also uses a ranking and popularity system, where unpopular videos are removed after a while.

Even social networking sites are getting in on the act. MySpace (www.myspace.com) supports the uploading of video, with a 100MB size cap per file. The range of formats supported is extremely long and covers most options you'd care to use, from DivX to 3GP2 mobile phone files. However, we found that MySpace's servers were often too busy to complete uploads. Facebook has also recently added video to its repertoire. At first it allowed users to embed YouTube videos, but now it has its own service. The company claims that this offers much better video quality than YouTube, although it hasn't released details of how much higher its streaming resolution is.

One site that has some unique qualities is Stage6 (<http://stage6.divx.com>), created by the people behind DivX. Stage6 places a whopping 2GB limit on the size of your video, enough for a full-length movie at DVD resolution, but unlike most other sites all videos must be uploaded as .DIVX files or DivX-encoded AVIs. Stage6 also has a weird concept called 'Karma', which is a measure of your participation in the community. The greater your Karma rating, the more privileges you get. These privileges include the ability to create your own channels.

Some video-sharing sites restrict access and are not open to all amateur user-generated

content. Al Gore, former US vice-president and star of the film *An Inconvenient Truth*, has helped found www.current.tv, a serious video news site devoted to citizen journalism. Current.tv has a UK-specific branch at <http://uk.current.com>. You upload your news-related video, which the site calls a Pod, and the site's staff watch and consider it. Videos that pass muster make it to the website, and the Current TV community can vote it on to the Top Ranked list and even the broadcast channel. Unlike most video-sharing sites, Current.tv has been picked up by satellite and cable TV. You can find it on Sky channel 193 and Virgin Media channel 155. So by submitting a video to Current TV you could end up on 'real' TV – and you get paid if you do, too.

One of the oldest names in online video, which straddles the gap between the user-generated content sites and these more professionally orientated options, is Atom Films (www.atomfilms.com). This trailblazing site is the host of such internet hits as *Star Wars Gangsta Rap*, viewed by over six million people. You can upload videos up to 100MB in size, or Flash animations up to 20MB. However, your videos are vetted by human beings and put on the site only if they make the grade. Hence, the content on Atom tends to be the cream of the crop, and the site claims to pay successful video-makers, too.

EDITING SOFTWARE

A number of editing applications are making online video distribution easier by building in direct support. Ulead was one of the first with Video Studio (£35 inc VAT from www.play.com). Since version 8, Ulead Video Studio has been able to upload video directly to Neptune Media Share. With PowerDirector 6, CyberLink has upped the ante. This program (£69 inc VAT



▲ Neptune Media Share was one of the first online video-sharing sites, but you have to pay to use it

from www.softwareparadise.com) connects to YouTube and Streamload's MediaMax service.

At the more professional end of the market, Adobe's Premiere CS3 (£1,488 inc VAT from www.zomp.net) includes encoding presets for Google Video, MySpace and YouTube. The application leaves you to do the uploading, but at least you don't have to mess around with encoding settings. Even Windows Movie Maker, which comes preinstalled on every Windows XP and Vista system, can upload video directly to the web. Supported services included Neptune Media Share and Mydeo.

If you don't use any of these for your editing, however, a very useful new utility for online video is Roxio Buzz, which is free to download from www.roxio.com/enu/solutions/roxiolabs/products/buzz/default.html (it was also included on the *Shopper* August 2007 cover disc). The basic version can import WMV, AVI, MPEG1, QuickTime and DivX formats. The decoder pack costs \$11.99 (around £6) and adds the ability to import MPEG2, MPEG4, 3GP and H.264. Buzz offers some video-editing capabilities that are limited mostly to trimming down clips. As Buzz accepts only one file at a

ONLINE VIDEO-SHARING SITES COMPARED

SERVICES	MONTHLY FEE	DETAILS	FILE SIZE LIMIT	FORMATS	STORAGE LIMIT	ACCEPTANCE POLICY	OTHER FEATURES
Atom w s	Free	www.atomfilms.com	100MB (video); 20MB (Flash)	MOV, QT, MP4, 3GP, 3G2, MPEG, MP2, WMV, ASF, AVI, DV	None	Atomfilms content team review	Hosts regular short-film festivals
Current.tv	Free	www.current.tv	2-7 minutes	3GP, 3GP2, AVI, DV, MPEG, MPG4, MOV, MQV, WMV, ASF	None	Current.tv team review	Top videos appear on cable/satellite channel
DropShots	Free-\$4.95 per month	www.dropshots.com	2 minutes (free service); 10 minutes (premium service)	MPEG1, 2 and 4, MOV, WMV	10 videos (free service); unlimited (premium service)	User agreement	Photo sharing, viewer comments
Facebook	Free	www.facebook.com	300MB/15 minutes (with mobile verification)	Any	None	User agreement	Social networking
GoFish	Free	www.gofish.com	100MB	MPEG, MP4, ASF, WMV, AVI, MOV, 3GP, RM	None	User agreement	Direct blog embedding tool
Google Video	Free	http://video.google.com	None (Uploader only)	MPEG, AVI, RA, RAM, MOV, WMV, ASF, MOD and MP3	None	Google team review	Pay-per-view options
Lulu	Free	www.lulu.com	None	Any	None	User agreement	Pay-per-download options
Microsoft Silverlight	Free/TBA	http://silverlight.live.com	None	WMV	4GB	User agreement	.NET-based application hosting
My5minutes.com	Free	www.my5minutes.com	None	Any	None	User agreement	Popularity ranking system
Mydeo	£4.87/£7.47 per month	www.mydeo.com	30 minutes/90 minutes	Any	100 minutes/250 minutes	User agreement	None
MySpace.com	Free	www.myspace.com	100MB	AVI, ASF, DV, WMV, MOV, QT, 3G2, 3GP2, 3GPP, GSM, MPEG, MP4, M4V, MP4V, CMP, DivX, XVID, .264, RM, RMVB, FLV, MKV, OGM	None	User agreement	Social networking
Neptune Media Share	\$59-\$599 per annum	www.neptune.com	None	WMV, MOV	150MB-10GB	User agreement	Photo sharing
Putfile	Free	www.putfile.com	25MB	WMV, AVI, MPEG, MOV, ASF, ASX, MP4 and 3G2	None	User agreement	Custom video homepage
Revver	Free	www.revver.com	100MB	MOV, MPEG, MP4, WMV, ASF, AVI (including DivX)	None	User agreement	Ad-revenue sharing
Stage6	Free	http://stage6.divx.com	2GB	DivX or DivX-encoded AVI	None	User agreement	Karma privilege-earning system
Streamload MediaMax	Free-\$29.95 per month	www.mediamax.com	10MB-unlimited	Any	25GB-1,000GB	User agreement	Photo-sharing, file-sharing, online data backup
VuMe.com	Free	www.vume.com	100MB	MOV, MPEG, 3GP, WMV, AVI	None	User agreement	Ad-revenue sharing
YouTube	Free	www.youtube.com	100MB/10 minutes	WMV, AVI, MOV and MPEG	None	User agreement and peer review	Viewer comments, channels



time, it's best used with clips you have prepared in other software, or simple footage such as a video blog. It can also take still images plus a music file and make a slideshow out of them, adding mild motion and transitions between the pictures.

The clever part of Buzz is that it can upload simultaneously to YouTube, GoFish and Microsoft's Silverlight, handling the appropriate encoding for you. Roxio also claims it will add more services as plug-ins in the near future. Buzz provides a wizard to fill in all the necessary tags and login information for YouTube and GoFish, then transcodes as necessary. Once your file is ready, it guides you through signing up to the three services it currently supports and lets you fill in your login details. Your video is then uploaded to your chosen sites. With Silverlight, Buzz uploads an entire application, then generates the code you need to add to your webpage's HTML to embed the video.

BE YOUR OWN HOST

Although most of the services we have described are primarily self-contained video-based communities, many also offer everything you need to embed the video stream into your own website. YouTube provides Embed HTML code under the Edit Video Info page. Simply add this to your website design to embed the video, although it will still be streamed from YouTube.

DivX's Stage6 provides similar cut-and-paste code, with the added bonus that you can either paste a simple embedded video or JavaScript, which includes a thumbnail and other advanced features. Revver also allows embedding, and GoFish not only provides the code, but will even post directly to a blog, including Blogger, Live Journal, TypePad and Wordpress.com.

A recent newcomer is Microsoft Silverlight Streaming (silverlight.live.com). Silverlight is a .NET-based platform for rich internet applications, including interactivity and video streaming. Microsoft's associated video-streaming service currently provides 4GB of free hosting, with streaming up to 700Kbit/s. After the beta phase, it will offer one million minutes at 700Kbit/s per website per month, or an unlimited amount with advertising. For a currently unspecified fee, unlimited streaming will be available without advertising.

You use your Windows Live! login – also your MSN login – to create a Silverlight Streaming account, which returns an ID and key. However, unlike the sites we've focused on

so far, Silverlight is an application-hosting service rather than a community-based video-sharing website. You will need to develop your own video front end – that is, you'll have to use your programming skills to create an interface for your video file.

Alternatively, you can use Roxio Buzz to create the appropriate JavaScript. Your viewers will need the Silverlight plug-in to enable in-browser video, which is currently on the release candidate of version 1. This is a quick automatic download and is available for Internet Explorer 6 and 7, Firefox 1.5 and 2 and Safari.

For the ultimate in customisation options, you could host your video on your own web server. The easiest format to use here is Flash video. You will need a Flash encoder, such as Sothink Video Encoder for Adobe Flash (www.sothinkmedia.com/flash-video-encoder/), to create your files. This also generates the necessary SWF player and HTML for your webpages. A 30-day trial is available, after which the software costs \$45 (around £22).

Before deciding to host your own videos, you should consider carefully the immense bandwidth requirements of video, even at low resolution. Imagine your video is just 30MB in size, and perhaps five minutes long. If you're lucky enough to have hundreds of viewers at once, your web server will be churning out tens of megabytes a minute, the kind of usage most ISPs charge a lot for. In other words, this option is worth considering only if you have serious commercial intentions for your video, and deep pockets. Otherwise, you're better off sticking with the ready-made services described earlier.

PROMOTION CANDIDATES

Getting your video online successfully is only part of the battle. You can forward the link to friends and family, but you probably want to show off your pride and joy to as wide an audience as possible. YouTube has an important tool for this built in: the Tags line in the Video info section. Providing a catchy title and appropriate description will help build interest in your video once viewers have found it, but you need to get them there in the first place.

This is where a sensible choice of Tags comes in. These are the keywords that YouTube's search engine uses, so putting the right words in here can significantly improve your chances of being noticed. Choose words that sum up the content of your video. For example, if the footage focuses on a car show



▲ Roxio's Buzz is a great utility for encoding, tagging and uploading your videos for the web, although it currently supports only three services

you recently attended, list the models of cars featured, along with a few synonyms for 'car', plus the location and any other relevant terms you can think of. Your video should then appear in the list of matches for a variety of different search criteria, and hopefully more people will watch it as a result.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Although it's very easy to think of internet TV as simply TV watched over the internet on a PC, it is fast developing into much more than that. The internet has always been a two-way medium, with a heavy emphasis on dialogue rather than the one-way communication of broadcasting. This is starting to play a major role in the most popular video-sharing sites, which have varying amounts of 'social networking' alongside the video content. Indeed, Facebook has come from the opposite direction, bolting video sharing to its pure social networking.

In other words, the chat that accompanies the video is almost as important as the video itself, so be prepared to field comments about your videos, and don't get too upset if anything nasty is posted. Maintaining calm, two-way communications will help you to build and maintain the interest in your work. On some sites, such as YouTube, your videos may also be downloaded and used in other people's video creations if you allowed this option. This could bring you more attention, and more viewers, which is presumably why you make video in the first place. With the current trend towards paying the most popular online video-makers, you could not only become an internet TV star but you get paid to be one, too. **CS**

Couch potatoes TV over the internet

The most exciting thing about internet broadcasting is its ability to put you, the consumer, in the director's chair. But you may be more interested in remaining on the sofa as a viewer. Internet video has provided a new avenue for established broadcasters as well as bedroom Steven Spielbergs.

Channel 4's video-on-demand service, 4oD, is available online at www.channel4.com/4od, and Channel Five's is at <http://download.five.tv>. Sky also has its Anytime download service, although this is available only to Sky subscribers.

But these established channels aren't your only option. As befits the democratic nature

of the internet, newcomers abound. One of the most exciting is Joost (www.joost.com), created by the people who brought you Skype and Kazaa. Joost already includes content from Channel 5's *Fifth Gear*, Sports Illustrated, Aardman Animations and other not entirely unknown names. Another interesting newcomer is www.babelgum.com. Its portfolio includes GONG anime and short films from the Rushes Soho and Giffoni festivals.

Both Joost and Babelgum offer levels of quality from streaming video that you wouldn't have believed possible over a regular broadband connection, and point the way to the couch potato experience of the future.



▲ The new generation of online video services such as Joost point the way to a very different type of TV consumption in the near future